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ABSTRACT

The Special Education Professional In Training (SEPIT) program is a tuition assistance program designed to alleviate critical shortages of special education teachers and clinicians in New York City Public Schools. It gives individuals the opportunity to pursue post-baccalaureate study and obtain placement in bilingual and monolingual special education teaching and evaluation. The New York City Board of Education pays for each participant to obtain a maximum of 12 college credits in special education to qualify for a certificate as a Preparatory Provisional Substitute Teacher. In exchange for tuition assistance, each participant must sign a contract that indicates that he/she will provide a minimum of 1 year of service in a special education setting. This evaluation of the program found it to be successful in placing teachers in special schools. Of 46 respondents to a questionnaire, 45 had completed the program and worked in the New York City Public Schools. Overall, the participants rated the program highly. However, they asked that the Board of Education be more helpful and flexible with their job placement, be more prompt in paying their college tuition to avoid their receiving late fees, and be more efficient in processing paperwork. (JDD)

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OER Report

EVALUATION OF THE 1991-1992 SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL IN TRAINING PROGRAM

APRIL 1994

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EVALUATION OF THE 1991-1992 SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL IN TRAINING PROGRAM

APRIL 1994

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Special Education Professional In Training (SEPIT) program is a tuition assistance program designed to alleviate critical shortages of special education teachers and clinicians. It gives individuals the opportunity to pursue post-baccalaureate study, and obtain placement in bilingual and monolingual special education teaching and special education evaluation.

PROGRAM FINDINGS

The Board of Education asked the Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) to evaluate the 1991-1992 SEPIT program. The program was successful in placing teachers in special schools. Of the 46 individuals who responded to the O.E.R.-developed questionnaire, 45 (98 percent) completed the program, and worked in the New York City Public Schools. Overall, the participants rated the program highly. However, they asked that the Board of Education: (1) be more helpful and flexible with their job placement; (2) be more prompt in paying their college tuition to avoid their receiving late fees; and (3) be more efficient in processing their applications, correspondence, and paperwork.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) recommends that the Board of Education continue the Special Education Professional In Training program, and:

- be more helpful and flexible with job placement,
- pay the tuition to the colleges more promptly to avoid late fees for the SEPIT participants, and
- be more efficient in processing program applications and paperwork.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Special Education Professional In Training (SEPIT) program is a tuition assistance program designed to alleviate critical shortages of special education teachers and clinicians. It provides individuals the opportunity to pursue post-baccalaureate study, and obtain placement in special education settings. The program is available to individuals who wish to become bilingual and monolingual special education teachers, and special education evaluators.

Eligibility Criteria

Candidates for admission into the SEPIT program must meet the following prerequisites:

- no prior employment with the New York City Board of Education as a regularly licensed or substitute teacher;
- a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university with proof of a minimum 3.0 final grade point average;
- completion of at least 12 credits of academic course work in education or a minimum of six education credits for bilingual candidates; and
- proof of U.S. citizenship or permanent residency.

Tuition Assistance Credits

The New York City Board of Education pays for each participant to obtain a maximum of 12 college credits in special education to qualify for a certificate as a Preparatory Provisional Substitute Teacher. Participants are expected to complete all twelve special education credits within one fiscal year (July 1 of a given year to June 30 of the following year).

Reimbursement

The New York City Board of Education pays tuition to the cooperating institutions of higher education at the prevailing CUNY rate.

Fees and Other Expenses

Candidates are responsible for the cost difference if the tuition per credit exceeds the CUNY rate. The New York City Board of Education reimburses an additional $37.00 to cover registration or laboratory fees for the participant's first semester in the program.

Service Obligation

Concurrent with the completion of courses, the program participants must apply for a certificate as a Preparatory Provisional Substitute Teacher. Upon the award of this certificate, the participants must accept an assignment in a hard-to-staff special education setting for a minimum of one year. In exchange for tuition assistance, each participant must sign a contract which indicates that he/she will provide a minimum of one year of service in a special education setting.

Participating Higher Education Institutions

Acceptance in the SEPIT program is contingent upon the program applicant's admission to a participating higher education institution. Program participants may apply for admission to any of the following participating institutions: Adelphi University, City College of New York, College of New Rochelle, College of Staten Island, Fordham University, Hofstra University, Long

Island University (Brooklyn campus), Mercy College, St. John's University, Wagner College, and Universidad Catolica de Puerto Rico.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.), in conjunction with representatives from the Board of Education's Office of Recruitment, Placement, Assessment, and Licensing, designed a questionnaire to evaluate how SEPIT participants rated various aspects of the program. O.E.R. sent this questionnaire to 136 SEPIT participants, asking them to fill it out and return it. Forty-six participants (34 percent) filled out the questionnaires and mailed it back. Eight questionnaires (six percent) were returned to O.E.R. undelivered, and the remaining 82 questionnaires (60 percent) were never returned to O.E.R. The data reported herein are based on the responses of the 46 participants who returned their completed questionnaires.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

Chapter I of this report provides a description of the SEPIT Program. Chapter II provides the major evaluation findings of this study. Chapter III provides O.E.R.'s conclusions and recommendations.

II. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The data reported herein are based on the responses of the 46 SEPIT participants who answered and returned their questionnaire. Of these 46 SEPIT participants, 45 (98 percent) completed the program and were working for the New York City Board of Education. These participants enrolled in both the monolingual and the bilingual special education program: 34 (74 percent) entered the monolingual special education program, 11 (24 percent) entered the bilingual (Spanish) special education program, and one (two percent) participant did not give a response to this item.

The participants began the SEPIT program at various times between fall 1990 and fall 1992 (see Table 1). The majority of the candidates (N=33; 72 percent) began the program in 1991. When the SEPIT participants were asked how they found out about the program, 26 (57 percent) participants reported reading an advertisement in the New York Times. Others reported hearing about it through Board of Education flyers and brochures, or a friend.

Participants' Reasons for Joining the Program

The participants listed multiple reasons for joining the program (see Table 2). The two most common reasons were interest in entering the special education field, and the tuition reimbursement incentive. Other reasons included interest in career advancement, a career change, looking for a job, and personal family reasons.

TABLE 1

INITIAL DATE OF ENROLLMENT IN THE PROGRAM

	Total Number of Respondents	Total Percentage of Respondents
Summer 1990	1	2
Fall 1990	1	2
Spring 1991	1	2
Summer 1991	15	33
Fall 1991	17	37
Spring 1992	8	17
Fall 1992	2	4
No response	1	2
	46	99[a]

[a] These percentages do not total 100 because of rounding errors.

- Thirty-three (72 percent of the total) participants began the program in 1991.

TABLE 2*

PARTICIPANTS' REASONS FOR JOINING THE PROGRAM

Reasons	Total Number of Responses	Total Percentage of Respondents
Interest in special education field	17	37
Tuition reimbursement	14	30
No response	8	18
Career advancement	7	15
Career change	5	11
Obtaining a degree in special education	1	2
Looking for a job	1	2
Personal family reasons	1	2
	54	117

* The 46 respondents gave more than one response to this O.E.R. questionnaire item. In addition, table percentages were calculated based on the 46 respondents rather than the total number of responses given; and therefore total more than 100.

- Interest in the special education field, and tuition reimbursement were the two most common reasons for joining the program.

The participants were asked whether they would have continued their education in the special education field without the help of the SEPIT program. Seventeen (37 percent) answered "yes," 14 (30 percent) answered "maybe," and 14 (30 percent) answered "no" (one participant did not respond).

PARTICIPANTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The Application Process

Participants were asked to rate the application process on a scale from zero (low rating) to five (high rating). Overall, they gave it a high rating: 43 (93 percent) applicants gave the application process a rating ranging from three to five. Eight (17 percent) participants suggested that the Board of Education could improve the application process by speeding up its information processing and the mailing of responses. Forty-three participants (93 percent) reported that the SEPIT program coordinators were helpful in recruiting them.

The Service Obligation

Participants were asked to rate the fairness of having to accept a job wherever offered in exchange for receiving free college tuition. They were asked to rate this service obligation using a scale from one to five, where one represented that it was unfair, and five that it was very fair. Overall, the participants rated the system as fair: 40 (87 percent) participants gave it a rating ranging from three to five. Nevertheless, 13 (29 percent) participants recommended that the Board of Education give them flexibility in their job placement.

One (two percent) participant proposed holding a job fair to meet the needs of the participants and of the schools more efficiently.

The Tuition Payment System

Participants were asked to rate the tuition payment system on a scale from zero (no experience) to five (high). Although 36 participants (79 percent) gave the tuition payment system a rating from three to five, 11 participants (24 percent) complained about the Board of Education's delay in paying tuition to their higher education institution. When a college did not receive the tuition payment on time, it requested that the SEPIT participants pay late fees or refused to issue a transcript altogether.

THE PROGRAM'S SUCCESS RATE

The program had a very high success rate. Forty-five (98 percent) of the 46 SEPIT participants completed the program and were currently working in the New York City Public Schools. Their titles included teacher, special education teacher, and bilingual special education teacher. Forty (87 percent) participants expected to be rehired in their present position next year.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 3. As can be seen in the table, the majority (72 percent) were females, and more (37 percent) were in the age group 41-50 than in any other age group.

TABLE 3

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Characteristic	Total Number of Respondents	Total Percentage of Respondents
Gender		
Females	33	72
Males	12	26
No response	1	2
	46	100
Age		
between 20-30	12	26
between 31-40	11	24
between 41-50	17	37
above 50	5	11
No response	1	2
	46	100
Ethnicity		
Wiiue14		30
Latino	12	26
African-American	2	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	4
White/Spanish	1	2
Puerto Rican	1	2
South American	1	2
No response	13	28
	46	98[a]
Languages Spoken[b]		
English	36	78
Spanish	13	28
French	4	9
Haitian-Creole	1	2
Other	7	15
	61	132

[a] Percentage does not total 100 because of rounding error.

[b] The 46 respondents gave more than one answer to this O.E.R. questionnaire item and therefore the total number of responses is greater than 46 and the percentages are greater than 100.

- The majority of the participants were females.
- More participants were in the age group 41-50 than in any other age group.
- Most participants were white, Latino, or African-American.
- More participants spoke English than any other language.

The majority of the participants were white, Latino, or African-American. Specifically, 14 participants (30 percent) classified themselves as white, 12 (26 percent) as Latino, 12 (26 percent) as African-American, and two (four percent) as Asian/Pacific Islander. Three (six percent) fell into some other classification.

When asked what languages they spoke, more participants replied that they spoke English than any other language. Thirty-six (78 percent) spoke English, 13 (28 percent) spoke Spanish, four (nine percent) spoke French, one (two percent) spoke Haitian-Creole, and seven (15 percent) spoke other languages including Portuguese, Italian, Urdu, Chinese, Yiddish, and Russian.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the participants rated the SEPIT program highly. Forty-one (89 percent) participants rated it from above average to excellent. Although the majority of the candidates considered it fair to have to perform a service obligation in exchange for receiving free college tuition, several candidates asked that the Board of Education be more helpful and flexible in the job assignment. A number of candidates suggested that the program would be improved if the Board of Education processed the applications and necessary paperwork more efficiently.

Although most candidates gave high marks to the tuition payment system, some candidates complained about Board of Education delays in paying the tuition to the colleges. When a college did not receive the tuition payment on time, it requested the SEPIT candidates to pay late fees or refused to issue a transcript altogether.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above comments, O.E.R. recommends that the Board of Education continue the program and:

- be more helpful and flexible in the job assignments;
- pay the tuition to the participating higher education institutions more promptly to avoid late fees to the SEPIT participants; and
- speed up processing the applications and the necessary paperwork to avoid delays.